Chapter II
Record of Events
Kwoma--Diary

October 12, 1936.

114 Yesterday was Sunday according to our figurings; it is the second Sunday
[123] since we arrived here. The Waskuk, with a finish/as their spokesman, declared timer that no work was to be done since it was Sunday. They were probably testing us out to see whether we were "missin" or not, for yesterday construction went on as usual on our house boy's houses. The houses were nearly completed, except for a few finishing touches. They also constructed an outhouse for us.

342 Hamb's house is almost square, constructed in the same manner as ours with frame and maratta roof. There are no porches on the gable end, but instead, a low verandah or gallery formed by setting the side wall back about three feet from the edge of the floor and under the eves on the south side. The walls consist of stiff thick reeds bound together like a weir of fence, and held together by two sets of strips bound to each other
352 with rattan wound spirally between each reed. Hamb is now making a bed. The uprights of the house form three of its posts and fourth is stuck through the floor in the middle of the room. He had bound cross pieces between these posts and is now nailing slats across parallel to the shorter side. Over this he intends to put a mattress of the same stiff reeds at right angles to the slats. Hamb is very proud of his house and considers it quite superior to anything that the Waskuk could construct.

342 Wisep's house is peculiar in that the roof was taken from an old
[483] tumbled down Waskuk house and was carried up bodily by about thirty-five of the Waskuks and set in place--a no small feat since the only mechanical device was two or three forked sticks which they used to extend their reach when the top edge of the roof was lifted onto the ridgepole. Also they set up a scaffolding of a pole lashed between the uprights.

[101] * Waskuk is the name by which the Kwoma were known by the Australian administration.

796 346 778 [532] [237] around a framework. At the front and back ends, tilting toward the center, were two huge masks, about four feet long and a foot wide. They were beautifully carved and painted in black, white, red, and green. At the top of each mask was fastened what looked like feather work, a semblance of hair. Capping this were plumes similar to those worn by the dancers themselves. The mask near the front was called asambwarú, and belonged to Waskuk (an old man of Waskuk actually owned it); the one at the rear was called abimakwa and belonged to Bangus (actually to the sicatriser). The space between the masks on the top of the altar was covered with shell ornaments. A pumpkin seed shaped ornament of small cowrie shells fastened in rows on a woven or closely matted fabric was called sawimwí. Another was similarly constructed, but shaped as a crocodile, with two larger shells for eyes, and called no maski (no means crocodile). Plumes, cockatoo, pigeon, etc, were set in various [535] places in addition to bit of yellow grass hung in bunches. Some of the dancers also wore this same yellow grass stuck into their arm and leg bands.

796 346 417 The front of the house tamberan had been hidden from view by a 6½' screen. While it prevented the women and children from seeing the sacred precincts, the men could and did stand up on the framework of the screen to look out onto the other side. The women and children were not to come until the next day, but some of the men, at least one anyway, were on the women's side. We did not dare look over the screen for fear of breaking some taboo.

796 533 [123] [352] After a few minutes, we were escorted to some seats (planks that had been hewn from 2' x 6' x 8" logs, and roughly carved), and told that the singing would begin soon. Some of the natives began to walk slowly and silently around the altar while the "lulusi" of Bangus, (one of the Kwoma hamlets) Sowinambi, began a verse in a high voice which ended in a prolonged o on the same note and fell off to a wí with shorter duration, on a lower note. This verse was answered from the other side of the screen in exactly the same manner, but with different words to the verse.

342 192 [284] kosuf yiju are slats fastened to the rafters with a figure eight lashing. The bundles are arranged but not sewn as above. They are left to flap. This is the most usual method of roofing for dwellings.

11. Process repeated for akd ne (porch extension).

12. Porch cap constructed.

342 335 192 The partition of the inner room is made by setting uprights (either round or split, akdwoyf ne, in the ground and lashing them to akd feyf (d) (plates) on the sides of the house and to a cross beam, kwas niene, which also serves as an inside floor joyce for the kwas nie (see 6 above). These partitioning uprights are spaced about 4 inches apart and lashed with split liana cord (fokw) on the outside. On the inside the partitions are lashed with sago spathes (mbi) which are overlapped and lashed to the uprights with split liana cord.

A door (monporirid) is made by a space left in the center of the partition, approximately 3 feet wide and 4 feet high. The door is encased by round sticks alternately parallel and upright to the ground and lashed with split liana cord.

342 353 352 Other finishing involved setting triangular shelves into corners here and there for storing pots. These shelves are about 3 feet from the ground. Under the kwas nie room floor, a couple of cross pieces are suspended from that floor joyce for storing spears, etc. The back porch is usually left unfinished.

342 [351] [352] Houses are usually built on flat ground and therefore a floor is not necessary. Sometimes coconut palm trunks are opened and flattened which serve as flooring. These would be found in houses raised above the ground, those that are built out of a hill, and some houses built on level ground.

The shingles are of sago fronds, attached to gross grids of split bamboo and lashed to the posts.